

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 3914

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SUBJECT: CURRENT ASSESSMENT OF INSURGENCY IN VENEZUELA-
APRIL 1978

REF: CARACAS 1820

SUMMARY: FOLLOWING WIDESPREAD STUDENT DISTURBANCES IN
FEBRUARY, ABETTED BY RADICAL AGITATORS, THERE HAVE BEEN ONLY
TWO MINOR INCIDENTS OF RURAL INSURGENCY DURING THE PAST
THREE MONTHS. THE RELATIVE CALM MAY INDICATE THAT INCREASED
MILITARY PRESSURE ON THE INSURGENTS, PARTICULARLY IN EASTERN
VENEZUELA IS HAVING SOME EFFECT. IT MAY ALSO MEAN THAT THE
INSURGENTS ARE REGROUPING AND LYING LOW. IN ANY CASE,
INSURGENCY IS NOT A MAJOR PROBLEM AND BARRING THE UNFORESEEN,
IT IS NOT EXPECTED TO BECOME AN ISSUE IN THE 1978 PRESIDENTIAL
ELECTION CAMPAIGN. END SUMMARY.

1. LOW-LEVEL OF OPERATIONS.

THE FATAL SHOOT OF A SAN FELIPE STUDENT ON FEBRUARY 14
DEGENERATED INTO A SERIES OF CONFRONTATIONS BETWEEN POLICE AND
STUDENTS BOTH IN PROVINCIAL CITIES AND CARACAS DURING FEBRUARY
(CARACAS 1663). THE GOV AND SECURITY AUTHORITIES BELIEVE
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THAT FRONT GROUPS FOR THE BANDERA ROJA (BR), ORGANIZACION
DE REVOLUCIONARIOS (OR), AND THE NATIONAL ARMED LIBERATION
FRONT (FLN) WORKED TOGETHER TO ABET THE DISTURBANCES.
THE EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT THE DISTURBANCES ARE MANIFESTATIONS
OF AN ENDEMIC CONDITION AND WERE RELATIVELY LIMITED IN BOTH
INTENSITY AND SCOPE. WHILE FAR-LEFT AGITATORS UNDOUBTEDLY
PARTICIPATED, THE MAJORITY OF THE DEMONSTRATORS WERE TEENAGER

MALES, AND THE BASIC CAUSES OF THE DISTURBANCES IN SOME CASES WERE DUE LESS TO OUTSIDE AGITATIONS THAN TO THE SLUM LIVING CONDITIONS OF THE DEMONSTRATORS. IN OTHER CASES, THEY WERE DUE TO THE PERCEPTION THAT ACCESS TO UNIVERSITIES IS SEVERELY LIMITED. IN ANY CASE, THE FEBRUARY DEMONSTRATIONS HAVE FADED FROM THE PUBLIC EYE, AND NEITHER THE PRESS NOR THE GOV BELIEVE THAT THEY PRESAGE ANY REAL EFFORT AT MASS URBAN TERRORISM. THIS CONCLUSION DOES NOT, OF COURSE, PRECLUDE THE POSSIBILITY OF ISOLATED URBAN TERRORIST ACTS. ASIDE FROM THE FEBRUARY DEMONSTRATIONS, THE LAST THREE MONTHS HAVE BEEN RELATIVELY CALM IN TERMS OF INSURGENT ACTS. ON MARCH 14, AN ARMY OFFICER AND A SOLDIER WERE SLIGHTLY INJURED WHEN THEIR PATROL WAS AMBUSHED NEAR THE TOWN OF SANTA MARIA OF IPIRE IN GUARICO STATE. DEFENSE MINISTER GENERAL PAREDES BELLOWS REFUSED TO QUALIFY THE SHOOTING AS A GURRILLA ATTACK, BUT RATHER TERMED IT A "CLASH" WHEN AN ARMY PATROL WAS FIRED UPON. THEN, ON APRIL 3, NEAR "EL CONSEJO" IN THE CENTRAL-WESTERN STATE OF ARAGUA, AUTHORITIES CAPTURED SEVEN "INSURGENTS" AT A TRAINING CAMP. INFORMATION AVAILABLE TO THE EMBASSY INDICATES THAT SIX OF THE SEVEN WERE YOUNG, IN THEIR LATE TEENS OR EARLY TWENTIES. SEVERAL HAD APPARENTLY BEEN INVOLVED IN ROBBERIES OF BANKS AND STORES IN THE AREA. THE EMBASSY'S TENTATIVE CONCLUSION IS THAT THE GROUP WAS TRAINING FOR FURTHER HOLD-UPS AND PROBABLY HAD POLITICAL AS WELL AS PECUNIARY ENDS IN MIND. THE GROUP'S AFFILIATION IS NOT CLEAR, ALTHOUGH ONE OF THE MEMBERS CLAIMED TO REJECT BOTH THE MIR

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AND THE FALN. THE PRESS CLAIMED THE GROUP WASTIED TO BANDERA ROJA, ALTHOUGH THE EMBASSY HAS NO EVIDENCETO THIS EFFECT. (SEE CARACAS 3236).

2. THE NUMBERS GAME.

DURING THE LAST YEAR THE EMBASSY HAS REPORTED THAT THE TOTAL NUMBER OF INSURGENTS IS PROBABLY IN THE RANGE OF 150 ACTIVISTS (100-120 IN THE BANDERA ROJA AND THE ANTONIO DE SUCRE GROUPS, AND 20-30 IN THE FALN). THESE ARE THE EMBASSY'S BEST ESTIMATES OF HARD CORE INSURGENTS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY AND ARE BASED ON REPORTS RECEIVED FROM VENEZUELAN INTELLIGENCE. THESE NUMBERS, HOWEVER, DO NOT INCLUDE MEMBERS OF QUASI-LEGAL FRONT GROUPS FOR TWO REASONS. THERE ARE NO RELIABLE ESTIMATES OF FRONT GROUP MEMBERSHIP AND THERE IS NO EVIDENCE THAT FRONT GROUPS ARE ACTUALLY INVOLVED IN THE INSURGENCY.

3. MORE THAN EASTERN VENEZUELA?

THE TWO MOST RECENT INCIDENTS OCCURED OUTSIDE THE "TRADITIONAL" EASTERN INSURGENCY AREA OF ANZOATEGUI, MONAGAS, SUCRE AND BOLIVAR STATES. HOWEVER, THE SANTA MARIA DE IPIRE ATTACK TOOK PLACE JUST OVER THE ANZOATEGUI LINE IN

GUARICO STATE. THIS COULD BE AN INDICATION THAT THE WESTWARD SWEEP OF THE MILITARY UNITS IN THE AREA MAY HAVE FORCED THE INSURGENTS TO MOVE WESTWARD. THE SEIZURES IN ARAGUA IN WESTERN VENEZUELA IS OF A DIFFERENT NATURE, HOWEVER, IN ARAGUA, THERE HAVE BEEN VARIOUS BANK ROBBERIES AND OTHER CRIMINAL ACTS WHICH HAVE NOT BEEN DIRECTLY ASSOCIATED WITH INSURGENTS. ACCEPTING THE POLITICAL MOTIVATION OF THE DETAINEES, HOWEVER, IT IS POSSIBLE TO SPECULATE THAT SMALL GROUPS OF YOUNG RADICALS ARE PREPARED TO COMMIT COMMON CRIMES TO OBTAIN MONEY FOR THE CAUSE.

4. CONCLUSION

AS THE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN MOVES INTO HIGH GEAR, NEITHER MAJOR PRESIDENTIAL ASPIRANT HAS EMPHASIZED TERRORISM AS A CONFIDENTIAL

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PROBLEM. THUS, WHILE NEVER FAR BELOW THE SURFACE OF THE PUBLIC CONSCIOUSNESS, TERRORISM HAS NOT BECOME A CAMPAIGN ISSUE OF IMPORTANCE. FURTHER, THE GOV HAS SYSTEMATICALLY REFRAINED FROM ANY PUBLIC DISCUSSION OF ITS MILITARY OPERATIONS IN EASTERN VENEZUELA, BOTH BECAUSE OF ITS FAILURE TO ERADICATE THE INSURGENTS AND IN THE BELIEF THAT SUCH DISCUSSION TENDS TO PROPAGANDIZE THE INSURGENTS. PRESIDENT PEREZ IN EARLY MARCH PROMISED THAT HE WOULD TURN OVER A PACIFIC COUNTRY TO HIS SUCCESSOR AND THAT THOSE DEDICATED TO SUBVERSIVE VIOLENCE "WILL END EITHER AS PRISONERS OR UNFORTUNATELY DEAD IN CLASHES WITH THE ARMED FORCES." (CARACAS 2084). MOST OBSERVERS SAW THIS MORE AS A STATEMENT OF THE PRESSURES UPON HIM TO END THE LIMITED INSURGENCY AND HIS OWN INABILITY TO DO MORE THAN HIS PREDECESSOR HAD DONE THAN A RELIABLE GUIDE TO THE FUTURE. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE SCALE OF INSURGENT OPERATIONS HAS DROPPED OFF SOMEWHAT COMPARED TO THE LAST SIX MONTHS OF 1977, AND THERE IS NO INDICATION THAT THE INSURGENTS HAVE BEEN ABLE TO MAKE SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS IN RECRUITING NEW HARD-CORE MEMBERS TO THEIR CAUSE. THUS THE PROGNOSIS IS FOR LIMITED TERRORIST ACTS DURING THE COMING MONTHS, MOSTLY IN THE RURAL AREAS. URBAN TERRORISM CANNOT BE DISCOUNTED COMPLETELY, BUT THERE IS LITTLE TO SUGGEST THAT RADICAL ORGANIZATIONS BELIEVE THE TIME IS PROPITIOUS FOR SUCH ACTS.

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